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Poems

Poems and fables

Gay, John

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Fable XVIII

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Let us a while the war suspend,
And reason as from friend to friend.

A truce? replies the Wolf. 'Tis done.
The Dog the parley thus begun.

How can that strong intrepid mind
Attack a weak defenceless kind?
Those jaws should prey on nobler food,
And drink the boar's and lion's blood.
Great souls with gen'rous pity melt,
Which coward tyrants never felt.
How harmless is our fleecy care!

Be brave, and let thy mercy spare.

Friend, says the Wolf, the matter weigh,
Nature design'd us beasts of prey;
As such, when hunger finds a treat,
'Tis necessary wolves should eat.
If mindful of the bleating weal,
Thy bosom burn with real zeal;
Hence, and thy tyrant lord beseech,
To him repeat the moving speech:
A wolf eats sheep but now and then,
Ten thousands are devour'd by men.
An open foe may prove a curse,
But a pretended friend is worse.

F A B L E XVIII.

The PAINTER who pleased no body and every body.

LEST men suspect your tale untrue,
Keep probability in view.

The trav'ler, leaping o'er those bounds,
 The credit of his book confounds.
 Who with his tongue hath armies routed,
 Makes ev'n his real courage doubted.
 But flatter'ry never seems absurd;
 The flatter'd always take your word;
 Impossibilities seem just;
 They take the strongest praise on trust.
 Hyperboles, tho' ne'er so great,
 Will still come short of self-conceit.

So very like a painter drew,
 That ev'ry eye the picture knew;
 He hit complexion, feature, air,
 So just, the life itself was there.
 No flatter'ry, with his colours laid,
 To bloom restor'd the faded maid:
 He gave each muscle all its strength;
 The mouth, the chin, the nose's length
 His honest pencil touch'd with truth,
 And mark'd the date of age and youth.

He lost his friends, his practice fail'd,
 Truth should not always be reveal'd;
 In dusty piles his pictures lay,
 For no one sent the second pay.

Two bustos, fraught with ev'ry grace,
 A Venus' and Apollo's face,
 He plac'd in view; resolv'd to please,
 Whoever sat, he drew from these,
 From these corrected ev'ry feature,
 And spirited each aukward creature.

F A B L E S.

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All things were set; the hour was come,
 His pallet ready o'er his thumb,
 My Lord appear'd; and seated right
 In proper attitude and light,
 The Painter look'd, he sketch'd the piece,
 Then dipt his pencil, talk'd of Greece,
 Of Titian's tints, of Guido's air:
 Those eyes, my Lord, the spirit there
 Might well a Raphael's hand require,
 To give them all the native fire;
 The features fraught with sense and wit,
 You'll grant, are very hard to hit;
 But yet with patience you shall view
 As much as paint and art can do.

Observe the work. My Lord reply'd,
 'Till now I thought my mouth was wide;
 Besides, my nose is somewhat long;
 Dear Sir, for me, 'tis far too young.
 Oh! pardon me, the artist cry'd,
 In this we painters must decide.

The piece ev'n common eyes must strike,
 I warrant it extremely like.
 My Lord examin'd it a-new;
 No looking-glass seem'd half so true.

A lady came, with borrow'd grace
 He from his Venus form'd her face.
 Her lover prais'd the painter's art;
 So like the picture in his heart!
 To ev'ry age some charm he lent,
 Ev'n Beauties were almost content.

Through all the town his art they prais'd;
 His custom grew, his price was rais'd.

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Had he the real likenefs shown,
 Would any man the picture own?
 But when thus happily he wrought,
 Each found the likenefs in his thought.

F A B L E XIX.

The LION and the CUB.

HOW fond are men of rule and place,
 Who court it from the mean and base!
 Theſe cannot bear an equal nigh,
 But from ſuperior merit fly.
 They love the cellar's vulgar joke,
 And loſe their hours in ale and ſmoke.
 There o'er ſome petty club preſide;
 So poor, ſo paltry is their pride!
 Nay, ev'n with fools whole nights will fit,
 In hopes to be ſupreme in wit.
 If theſe can read, to theſe I write,
 To ſet their worth in trueſt light.

A Lion-cub, of fordid mind,
 Avoided all the lion kind:
 Fond of applauſe, he ſought the feaſts
 Of vulgar and ignoble beaſts;
 With aſſes all his time he ſpent,
 Their club's perpetual preſident.